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RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4421
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3521
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8555
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6000
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0691
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2825
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000595

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LOW EXPECTATIONS FOR NORTHERN TASK
FORCE; GSL TIGHTENS TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS IN NORTH

REF: A. COLOMBO 588

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 465

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. On April 30, the Cabinet approved President Rajapaksa's proposal for a Special Task Force (STF) for Northern Development to administer the Northern Province.

He appointed Minister of Social Welfare and Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) leader Douglas Devananda as Chairman of the STF, which will serve as a "prelude to the Northern Provincial Council" and will focus on development activities in the Northern districts. Public reaction to the STF, particularly in the North, has been skeptical. Meanwhile, the government has taken steps to tighten restrictions on movement of citizens between the North and the rest of the country, including announcing that all residents of northern districts must obtain a pass before traveling South. The GSL also issued an order that no Tamils may pass south through the main checkpoint used to exit the Vanni until further notice. End Summary.

President Creates Committee to Administer the North

[1](#)2. (U) On April 30, the Cabinet approved President Rajapaksa's proposal for a Special Task Force (STF) for Northern Development to administer the Northern Province. He appointed Minister of Social Welfare and Eelam People's Democratic Party leader Douglas Devananda as Chairman of the STF. Devananda has said the STF will serve as a "prelude to the Northern Provincial Council" and will focus on development activities in the northern districts of Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaithivu. The group also includes Minister for Rehabilitation Rishad Badiuddin and senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa. The official announcement said the "body will provide advice to all ministries, departments and statutory bodies of the state and will help coordinate operations in the area. It will also oversee resettlement and rehabilitation work, facilitate coordination between the executive and the Consultative Board proposed by the All-Party Representative Committee, and where necessary provide proposals and ideas to the Governor of the Northern Province." Devananda said he has directed the STF

to focus on developing rural villages on the Jaffna Peninsula and improving infrastructure such as electricity, roads, irrigation, health care, education, libraries, and housing.

13. (U) The concept of a northern advisory body has been floated before. In 1995, Chandrika Kumaratunga's administration and the LTTE, in an exchange of letters, discussed a northern authority for reconstruction. Hostilities resumed shortly after and the body was never created. In 1999, President Kumaratunga gazetted an Advisory Committee under the Emergency Regulations to counsel the governor of the Northeast on various issues, including law and order. These regulations lapsed in 2001 and the body was never constituted.

14. (U) Embassy contacts say that public reaction to the STF, particularly in the North, has been skeptical. Most observers do not see this as a serious effort to make improvements in the North, particularly with the appointment of Devananda as Chairman. They expect human rights violations, including abductions, disappearances and killings, to continue.

Vehement Protest from TULF Leader Anandasangaree

15. (U) Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader V. Anandasangaree has strongly and publicly objected to the GSL's appointment of Devananda to lead the STF. In a lengthy letter to President Rajapaksa, which was published in full by

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local newspapers, Anandasangaree argued that Devananda was an inappropriate choice to lead such a group because of his record of corruption, election rigging, and human rights abuses. He notes that Devananda's EPDP cadre continue to operate as a paramilitary, engaging in extortion, abductions and killings the North and East and in Colombo. Anandasangaree also made public a June 16 letter to Devananda reiterating his concerns and making it clear that he does not wish to join the STF.

Government Tightens Travel Restrictions on Citizens in the North

16. (U) On June 16, the Defense Ministry issued an order to the Medawachchiya checkpoint, the main entry point for people traveling South from the Vanni, prohibiting Tamil citizens from traveling south beyond the checkpoint until further notice. A group of university students, traveling south for exams, were prevented from passing. Local contacts report that the students' pleas to the Officer in Charge (OIC) at the checkpoint were ignored and that the OIC told the students that "all Tamils are Tigers who bomb the police." (Note: This is likely a reference to the attack on a police station in Vavuniya on June 16 (ref a).)

17. (U) The government announced on June 12 that special ID cards, first proposed several months ago, will be issued within the next 3 months to all residents of Jaffna. The ID cards will serve as a security clearance, allowing people to travel to and from Jaffna without applying for a pass for each trip. The IDs will be color-coded according to profession. So far, only priests have received their IDs. Under the current system, passes to travel to the south are taking 15 days to process. In Jaffna town, the curfew has been moved from 9pm to 7pm, and bus service now ends at 4:30pm.

18. (U) Local media on June 9 reported that all residents of Mannar, Kilinochchi, Mullaithivu, and Vavuniya will be required to obtain clearance for travel to Colombo and other areas in the south. This process would mirror the clearance procedure already implemented for residents of Jaffna. Those wishing to travel will be required to submit a written

application to the police stating the reason for the visit, where they will stay, and when they plan to return. Residents of Kilinochchi and Mullaithivu will need to apply for passes in Vavuniya. The ICRC Administrator reports that the proposed system has not yet been implemented because orders from the Defense Ministry have not been received. An anonymous government official, quoted in the local press, said that the new measures were intended to prevent infiltration of Tiger guerrillas into Colombo and the rest of the south.

19. (C) COMMENT: Anandasangaree's critical letters, while largely true, likely reflect his resentment at not being chosen to head the STF. However, we share his assessment that the STF is unlikely to bring substantial change to the North under Devananda's leadership. The closing of the checkpoint to Tamils and proposed pass system are clear infringements of the right of Sri Lankans to travel and live in any part of the country they choose and are probably vulnerable to a fundamental rights challenge in the Supreme Court.
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